



2022 County Council Executive Questionnaire

The Food Council invited all County Executive candidates to complete a 9-item questionnaire, which was developed in collaboration with our community partners. Our goal is to provide information on local candidate's food system priorities and commitments. As a 501c3 nonprofit organization, we do not endorse candidates.

For more information, please contact Heather Bruskin, Executive Director at hbruskin@mocofoodcouncil.org.

Name: **Hans Riemer**

Campaign Website: www.hansriemer.com

Candidate for: **County Executive**

1. Please describe your personal and/or professional engagement in any local food systems initiatives, policies, and programs.

A: Having served on the County Council since 2010, I have played an important role in establishing the Food Council and a wide array of programs that are building on the Council's vision.

One of my favorite examples is local production of beer, wine and spirits, an industry that could shift from large scale global commodity crops and manufacturing to local farming and manufacturing.

Before I joined the County Council, there really was no local production industry to speak of. Montgomery County was an exceptionally hostile place for breweries. But working with local entrepreneurs, I changed that. Leading the Council, I proposed reforms that allowed local breweries to bypass the Department of Liquor Control and reduced exorbitant taxes and fees on new businesses. We fixed zoning for local makers so they could operate in urban districts and industrial areas and the Agricultural Reserve. While many strict preservationists in the Ag Reserve opposed our efforts to allow for breweries and wineries, we found a great approach that allows a brewery to operate in land zoned for Ag but requires a brewery to use locally grown ingredients. This successful approach has led to a boom in farm-breweries and wineries while generating a similar boom in



locally grown hops and barley, ingredients used for these products. Just as important, we have a strong consumer culture supporting local production that values both manufacturing and agriculture as integral to the process. That's what I call a win-win.

2. Please describe any plans you have for creating economic opportunities for individuals who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx/Latino, and/or a person of color, particularly in food and agriculture?

A: Recently I proposed and the Council and County Executive agreed to fund a new set of programs to support BIPOC entrepreneurs. These programS` will be available to support entrepreneurs in food and agriculture who are looking to start or expand businesses:

*\$200,000 for the County to initiate a Center for Minority and Women Entrepreneurs in the County's incubator network

*\$100,000 for a contract with the Maryland Black Chamber of Commerce for its Leadership Academy and a Small Business Lending Feasibility Study (to create a CDFI for minority-owned businesses);

*\$31,000 for a contract with the Black Business Council for its Black Business Database

*\$175,000 for a contract with the Maryland Small Business Development Center (SBDC) for programs including a "CEO Accelerator," including in Spanish language

*\$50,000 for a contract with the Maryland Procurement and Technical Assistance Center to provide small businesses with assistance in obtaining federal, state and Montgomery County procurement prime and subcontracts

*\$60,000 for a contract with Nonprofit Village to provide for support and training for nonprofits founded and operated by Black and minority executives

*\$173,000 to support the Black Collective for leadership and stakeholder engagement, community engagement forums, Black business training and technical assistance, a community online information portal and a community engagement assessment and environmental scan.

Any entrepreneurs who are interested in how to access these programs should contact me at councilmember.riemer@montgomerycountymd.gov. Thank you!

3. Please describe your position on addressing income insufficiency, which is a major contributor to food insecurity in our County. Please describe any positions or initiatives in your platform that focus on food security.

A: Since joining the Council, I have championed numerous initiatives to promote income sufficiency. I have fought for this cause because I know that the most important thing for a community's health is the ability of a family to provide for itself. At the center of that question is economic well being.

A few examples:

*Raising the County's EITC so that it increases the state EITC by 100%. The EITC is our country's most important anti-poverty program for working families.



*Raising the minimum wage to \$15. I was one of the five council members who stood strong against a weak compromise on that policy.

*Making RideOn free for kids, seniors and people with disabilities

*Increasing funding for affordable housing

*Pandemic emergency measures including rental assistance, small business assistance, income assistance and more

I will continue my advocacy for these vital programs including universal pre-k, universal after school programs, and more critical measures that ensure families have greater security and disposable income.

4. What role should the County government have in improving resident access to federal benefit programs, such as SNAP and WIC.

A: The County should guide an applicant to all available benefits, from the EITC to SNAP to WIC to Montgomery Cares clinics. One campaign that I have championed builds on my successful advocacy for increasing the EITC at the County level; that program is tax preparation services. Unfortunately about 20% of people who are eligible for tax benefits do not file tax returns. I have worked to increase our local investment in tax preparation services and campaigns in order to reach these residents and help them claim federal benefits that they are eligible for. More programs like these will help us pull down federal dollars into our local community and help people meet their needs.

5. It is likely that the impacts of climate change, national and global politics, and future disasters will further disrupt food production, supply chains, and food security networks. Please describe any policies and programs that you will propose or support to address local food system resilience?

A: Our first focus should be on disrupting the trends that are causing climate change so that we can prevent future destruction. We have an amazing opportunity locally to both meet climate goals and local food system goals. That opportunity is a best practice, now fully endorsed by the UN IPCC: blending farming and solar. The way to do that is to allow farmers to build solar arrays on their land with the requirement that they can only do so if they continue agricultural production beneath the solar arrays. For example, grazing sheep under solar arrays is a best practice that has been well adopted in other states and has two very substantial climate positive impacts: production of solar energy and sequestration of carbon through soil that is no longer being disturbed through crop farming. It also creates a local food economy -- today, nearly 90% of our lamb is imported. Furthermore, allowing for limited solar deployments can help farmers who need a predictable revenue source for their land in order to take more risk to grow local food as opposed to commodity crops. This win-win solution was sadly opposed and blocked by County Executive Marc Elrich when I proposed it in 2019, but as County Executive I will build consensus and make it happen in order to improve both climate and local food systems.

6. Please describe any initiatives or policies you would propose to increase local food production and access to affordable agricultural land.



A: I would continue to expand programs that offer production contracts to local farmers who grow vegetables for local food relief programs at a competitive price. I would establish programs for local farmers to grow vegetables for MCPS and other large food vendors in the County at a competitive price.

7. Please describe any initiatives or policies you will propose to reduce food waste and advance zero-waste strategies.

A: I am passionate about composting as I have been composting since I was a young kid, thanks to my parents. The County Executive has failed to move quickly on a composting strategy for the County. We need an Executive who will quickly finalize a plan and get moving on a facility for curb-side composting for all County residents and businesses. That's what I'll be.

8. Where do you see opportunities for the County government to support food education? How can the County support residents in making healthy and sustainable food choices easier?

A: There is a lot of work underway to help MCPS procure locally grown food to use in school meals. This is a great opportunity not only to support local agricultural production but also to educate school kids about where food comes from and how whole or less processed food is more healthy. As County Executive I will support and build on this work. A food revolution is within our reach at MCPS and I want to help make it happen.

9. What do you see as the biggest food system challenges in the County and what do you believe is the role of the County Executive in addressing them? How should community stakeholders be engaged in that work?

A: We have so many resources that we do not use adequately. One example: Feed the Fridge. I have been working to support a restaurant-driven program, Feed the Fridge, that raises charitable dollars to hire restaurant workers who prepare meals and deliver them to people in need. This is a great example of how investments in food systems can employ residents and support our local economy while meeting food policy objectives. We need more of this kind of system-thinking.

We also need more facilities to support local food entrepreneurs. Commercial settings where a person can test out and then manufacture a food product using ingredients from local farms is a significant need. Several years ago I secured support from the County to fund a study about local food production and manufacturing but under our current leadership those plans have languished. As County Executive I will take more effective action to move those ideas forward. As County executive I'll work with the Food Council to identify more opportunities to build our food system.

